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FACTORS OF FAITH
IN IMMORTALITY
JAMES DENNEY, D.D.



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Edited by

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, LL.D.

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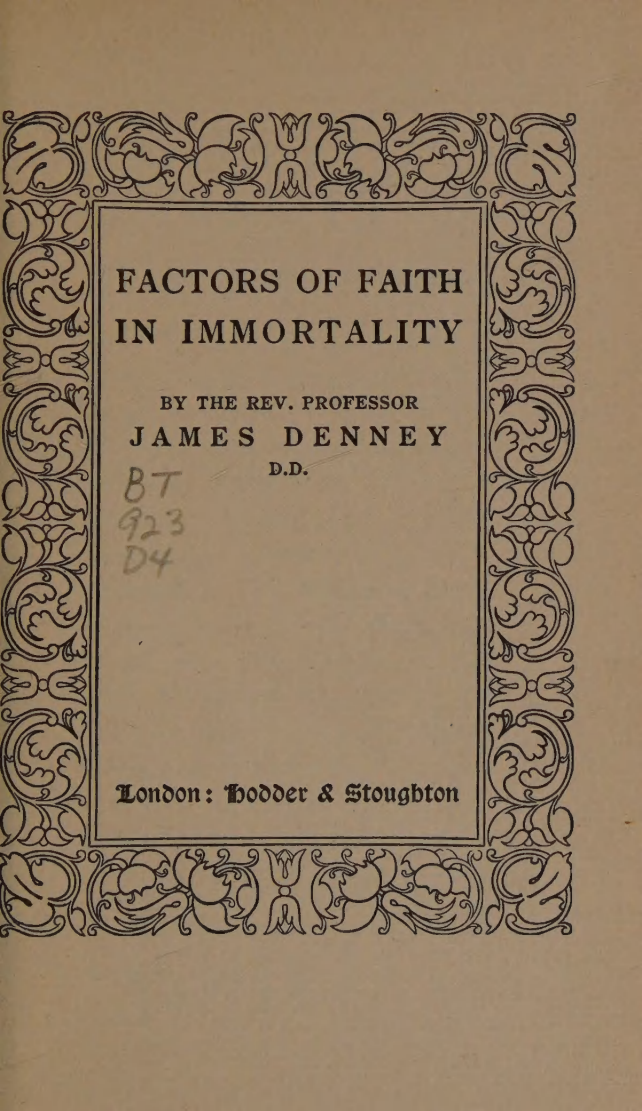
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**FACTORS OF FAITH
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BY THE REV. PROFESSOR
JAMES DENNEY

D.D.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE *Drew Lectureship*, which is connected with Hackney and New College, provides for the delivery and publication of an annual lecture on *the Nature and Destiny of the Soul*. The lecture is to have some special reference to personal immortality. The following pages represent with a few slight additions and modifications the lecture which was delivered in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, on October 7, 1910.



FACTORS OF FAITH IN IMMORTALITY

THE term immortality has been applied in such various senses, and the thing meant by it has been conditioned in such various ways, that it is necessary to make clear from the outset the assumptions on which the following discussion proceeds. It takes for granted that there has been such a thing in

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human history as a belief in the immortality of man—a belief, at the very lowest, in the survival by the human being of the blank experience of death. It does not make any assumption as to the constitution of humanity, or of any of its parts or aspects, such as body or soul. It does not proceed upon a doctrine of personality or individuality, whether incipient or absolute, such as leads directly to immortality as its conclusion.¹ Rather it may be described as

¹ For an argument of this sort see

purely empirical. It starts with the belief in immortality as it has actually emerged in human experience, and tries to discover the causes and motives to which it owes its origin, and the significance which such causes and motives have for us. If the faith justifies itself on such scrutiny, I do not say to any formal logic or to any metaphysical system, but to a human being interested in life with its problems and necessities, it may throw light upon

Professor Royce's lecture on '*The Conception of Immortality.*'

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the nature of the soul; but it does not seem to me hopeful to start with what we think the nature of the soul, and to deduce immortality from that. The soul reveals itself in its achievements, and surely it is one of its signal achievements that in a world in which nothing continues in one stay, and in which analogy is universally opposed to the idea,¹

¹ This has been felt ever since man has been able to leave any record of his thoughts and feelings. The incomparable lines of Homer (*Il.* vi. 146 ff.) are echoed in all literature: οἴη περ φύλλων γενεή τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν, κτλ.

it has not only conceived but asserted its immortality.

The faith in immortality, as is well known, has existed in very various forms. In its primitive forms it is almost purely negative. It has its origin not in the ambition of man, nor in his sense of his own value, but rather in the impotence of his mind. He believes in the continuance of his being after death because he is incapable of forming such an abstract conception as that of his extinction. Broadly speaking, we

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may say this is what we find in the earlier stages of religious history in races so unlike as the Hebrews and the Greeks. The Sheôl of the Old Testament and the House of Hades in the *Odyssey* both belong to this stage. In both there is a world beyond death in which existence is continued, but men do not believe in it or hope for it under the impulse of motives which have any meaning or any value for us. They believe in it only because they are unable to realise the alternative of annihilation.

But they have no use for it. It is not a motive in life other than death itself would be. It has not to be won. It is not a reward or a punishment. Nothing is done in it; it has no ethical character at all. It simply awaits men as a state from which life, meaning, and value have departed, and it awaits them all alike. It does not need to be proved that faith in immortality, of this sort, has no power of conviction in it. It has no motive behind it which appeals to us, and it reveals, not the reach

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that is in human nature, but the limitations of unexercised and undeveloped human faculty.

How the mind escaped from this negative and impotent relation to death it is perhaps impossible clearly to tell. But it did escape. Look at what can be seen in the history of a single race. The Homeric Greeks, as has just been said, could not think effectively of life as coming to an end. In a sense, no doubt, death was the end of it; but it continued after death, for ordinary men, in an inconsequent and mean-

ingless fashion, which it would be quite inept to describe as a triumph over death. It was no triumph; death, not life, was the real victor. There was no such thing as immortality, as a hope for man: as Rohde says, no expression is less conceivable in Homer than 'immortal souls.' But in the sixth century before Christ, two or three centuries after Homer, we find another condition of mind widely prevalent in Greece. It is in most respects diametrically opposed to the Homeric. In Homer,

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the body is real and living, and it is only in union with it and its vital forces that the soul can enjoy what is truly life; in the Orphic poetry or religion it is the soul which lives; the body is a tomb or a prison in which it is confined, and man's chief end is to achieve his soul's deliverance from it. The soul is divine—it might not improperly be called a god which lives in man—and it only attains to freedom and to true life when it breaks the chains which bind it to the body. At the stage of reflec-

tion which is here represented it is not so much a philosophy with which we are dealing as a religion, and we must not exaggerate its philosophic aspects. Many of its ideas passed over into philosophy and were manipulated and interpreted there, but essentially the movement of mind which produced them was religious, not speculative. With religion of this kind there naturally comes a corresponding morality. It is not the morality of the citizen, who has the ends of his life here,

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political and social ; it is the morality of the member of a church, who has the ends of his life in a region which transcends the state ; it is a disciplinary or ascetic morality. Its characteristic ideas are those of purification and liberation : men who have come, through whatever experiences, to take this general look at life, wish to be purified from the defilement of the body and delivered from its burden. I do not mean to consider the value for this purpose which was attached to ritual or sacra-

mental acts of various kinds. Practically the problem was very hard. Ascetic living such as some Orphic sects practised, abstaining, for example, from animal food, was not sufficient to secure the emancipation of the soul. Even natural death was not sufficient. Though the soul survived in separation from the body, the Orphic thinkers seem to have been unable to realise its disembodied state. They shared in the wide-spread belief which we know as transmigration, but which they usually called

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παλιγγενεσία or *μετενσωμάτωση*, new birth, or the entrance into a new body. The process of purification was supposed to go on through the successive embodiments of the soul, and each new embodiment answered in its comparative dignity or degradation to the comparative failure or success of the soul in the previous stages of its task. But a trace of the old inability to deal effectively with the idea of death always remained. The Orphic sects had no positive or satisfying conception of what the soul's final emancipa-

tion meant. What they did represent with profound feeling of its truth was the idea that the soul is superior to the body and ought to be independent of it—that the body depresses and defiles the soul — that purity and emancipation from the body are ends for which men ought to strive. Something which may quite fairly be called a belief in the immortality of the soul, or an impulse toward such a belief, is involved in this whole mode of thought.

Every one must feel that, open to criticism as it is, this

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Orphic mode of conceiving the nature and destiny of the soul appeals to us as the Homeric does not. The reason of this is that it does not represent a mere limitation of human faculty, an incapacity in our nature for forming certain ideas; it has experiences behind it to which we have the key, and motives to which our nature responds. No one will ever have any interest in immortality which counts—any interest which makes immortality a matter of moral consequence—apart from these

experiences and from the appreciation of these motives. It is not possible, indeed, for us, to think of soul and body as so loosely related to each other as they were in the Orphic creeds, and transmigration, or the rebirth of the soul in another body, is accordingly incredible; my body is the body of my soul, and my soul is the soul of my body; but what corresponds to this Orphic distinction in our minds—corresponds to it in ethical import, of course—is the distinction between man and the world.

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The sense of the incomparable value of a person as compared with all things—the profound and immediate conviction that a person is absolutely distinct in kind from things and that his destiny is not involved in theirs—this, however it rises into consciousness, is one of the primary factors of faith in immortality. But it is reinforced here by a consideration which also appeals to us strongly. Man is essentially distinct from mere things, yet things exercise a strange tyranny over him. He is superior to the

material and external world, yet it oppresses him, defeats him, humbles him at every turn. He is most conscious of this at the point at which he is in immediate contact with the world, his own body. It is there he finds concentrated and focused all that thwarts, defiles and degrades him. If he is ever to be himself, he must *achieve* himself; he must *win* his soul; he cannot take it for granted. That purged and emancipated life of the soul in which he recognises his true mode of being is a conditioned

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immortality ; it is not there for everybody, but for those who fight, who discipline themselves, who endure and overcome. This is another primary factor of faith in immortality. Just as no one can understand such faith, or be in a position to appreciate it, who is not conscious that persons and things are incommensurable, and that to argue from things to persons is invalid, so no one can understand it, or be in a position to appreciate it, who is not conscious of moral obligations in comparison with

which nothing in the world counts. Life itself is not to be weighed against them. This is the sense of the superiority of personality to things raised to a new power and intensity. In the common experience of our race we do not find anything that can be called the *natural* immortality of the soul, except that neutral and meaningless continuance of its existence represented by Hades and Sheôl; wherever there is *real* immortality, a continuance of existence which has meaning for us now, and by which death

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is overcome and deprived of its finality, it is morally conditioned. It may be a doom, or an achievement, but it belongs to the moral, not to the physical world. Ideas like that of the indestructibility of the soul have never been factors of faith in immortality in any real sense. They have never functioned in real life so as to beget such faith. If they had, we might talk of natural or unconditional immortality; but so far as we know historically, positive and significant faith in immortality has always been

conditioned in such ways as have been described. Just as no one can know the meaning of good or evil except by taking part in the life of a moral world, so no one can know whether man is what we mean by immortal or not except by entering into the experiences in which men have been assured of the incomparable value of personality, and have felt themselves summoned to a life in view of which all transitory things lost their reality and their value at once. I do not propose it as an equivalent

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of the ideas into which the Orphic sects of Greece read the riddle of human nature, but the pith of them all, especially in relation to immortality, is in our Lord's question: What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose himself? It is out of the sense of his own value, as contrasted with that of the whole world, that a genuine hope of immortality springs for man; and if we wish to have such a hope we must cherish at once this sense of the value of man, in ourselves and in others, and

of all the moral obligations which it imposes. These, I repeat, are primary factors of faith in immortality.

Orphic ideas about the soul and its destiny reappear, though without much reflection upon them, in many of the earlier thinkers of Greece. They can hardly be said to be native to philosophy: they are borrowed by the philosophers from the priests. It is not till we come to Plato that we find a genuinely philosophical discussion of the subject. Whatever we

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may think of its historical or speculative importance, the *Phaedo* is a supreme work of art, and it is as much through the immediate impression which it makes upon us in this character as through a minute study of its arguments that we can discover the factors of Plato's faith in immortality. Partly, it is evident, the Orphic ideas have done their work. The speakers and the audience alike have been brought up to believe in the value and the immortality of the soul:

that is the orthodoxy which they would naturally profess. But it is challenged at the moment by the presence of death. Objections to it cannot be evaded or treated lightly: if it is to be justified or defended it must be with all seriousness and truth. The formal argument in which Socrates vindicates the immortality and indestructibility of the soul hardly interests us. It is like what is called the ontological argument for the being of God: it either proves nothing, to the simple

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mind, or it proves nothing interesting or relevant. The soul—so it runs—is that to the essence of which it belongs to live, just as to the essence of duality evenness belongs, or to the essence of the triad oddness; hence life and soul are inseparable, as duality and evenness are inseparable, and soul can never die. It is difficult to lean one's weight on this, and fortunately it is not necessary. What is of greater importance is to notice, as we can do indirectly, the motives which prompted

the construction of such questionable aids to faith. It is in these motives, and not in the arguments contrived to support them, that the real factors of the belief in immortality are seen. One is formally connected with Plato's theory of ideas. The ideas—truth, goodness, beauty, for example—do not belong to the transient and sensible world, but to a world which is supersensible and abiding. But the soul has an affinity for these ideas, a latent affinity it may be; it is in

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the soul to apprehend them, to appreciate them, in some way or other to become identified with them, and to share their transcendent and immutable being. The soul's state in the body is unequal to its true nature, and the aim of the philosopher is by a daily dying to the body to attain—or, as Plato would say, to get back—to its true state. Philosophy is the soul's occupation with universal and eternal objects, and a being which can occupy itself with such objects is surely not

destined to a merely temporary life. As Plato's philosophy was vital as well as abstract there is a real affinity between this and the religious idea that it is in communion with an eternal God that man is raised above his own mortality. The motive to faith, the impulse which originates and sustains it, is the dawning sense of a kinship with the divine, asserting itself as the soul becomes conscious that in philosophy and science it can give itself to absolute ends unaffected by time.

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There is an incongruity in the idea that such a being should die as the brute creatures die. But there is more than this in the *Phaedo*. The faith in immortality is connected also with Plato's belief in the moral government of the world. True philosophers are completely freed from the body by death, and enter at once on the blessed life of pure souls. But the bad would have too good a bargain if for them death was the end of all.¹ Plato knows

¹ There is a curious echo of this—if

quite well the limitations of his knowledge here, and that he is mythologising when he borrows the Orphic idea of transmigration to embody his moral convictions as to the future of wicked or imperfect men; but he knows also that the moral law extends into this region, and inspires our faith as well as shapes our thoughts about it. The moral sense of what the soul deserves, as well as the philo-
 it is an echo—in the *Clementine Homilies* xi. 11: ἀθάνατος γὰρ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τῶν ἀσεβῶν, οἷς ἄμεινον ἦν μὴ ἀφθαρτον αὐτὴν ἔχειν.

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sophic sense of what it is, are essential factors of his faith in its future. Both of these, however, and much more to which it is not easy to give abstract expression, are concentrated in the one great argument for immortality which the *Phaedo* presents, namely Socrates. It is not the dialectic which impresses us, but the person and the character. In such a presence we feel the indignity of death. It is monstrous that brute necessities should sentence such a being to extinction — that nature

should assert itself, as it were in lawless violence, against such a spirit. This, of course, is a value judgment, and from this point of view it may be said that what we find in the *Phaedo* is not so much arguments for the immortality of the soul as a demonstration or exhibition of the immortality of Socrates. And I believe this is the truth. What we find is the picture of a human being so wonderful that in his presence a mind which sees and feels what he is cannot but bestir itself to

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assert against the arrogance of death the might and value of the soul. The process may not be absolutely convincing, but surely the motive is intelligible. We may say, if we will, that it only leads to pragmatist convictions, and to conditional immortality; but pragmatist convictions may be all that are open to us in the way of experience, and if unconditioned immortality is only the meaningless inability to think death which we have seen in the conceptions of Sheôl and Hades, we need

not be scared by the words
It is the whole moral pheno-
menon which impresses us in
the *Phaedo*, and unless we are
impressed by it as Phaedo
himself was, we shall never
understand the factors of
Plato's faith in immortality.
'I had a singular feeling,'
Phaedo says, 'at being in his
(Socrates') company. For I
could hardly believe that I
was present at the death of
a friend, and therefore I did
not pity him, Echebrates; his
mien and his language were so
noble and fearless in the hour



of death that to me he appeared blessed. I thought that in going to the other world he could not be without a divine call, and that he would be happy, if any man ever was, when he arrived there; and therefore I did not pity him as might have seemed natural at such an hour.' Only, I repeat, when this impression is renewed in us can we do justice to Plato's arguments. They are convincing only so far as each of them is the reflection of something of spiritual worth in Socrates

—his devotion to universal and eternal truth, his kinship (to put it so) with the divine, his absolute recognition of moral law. There the motives lie which alone give interest to arguments for immortality, because they beget them ; and wherever there is real faith in immortality, not a nominal inherited belief or traditional orthodoxy in the matter, these are factors of it.

No new light, or none of importance, is cast on our subject either by the faith or the scepticism of the ages

succeeding Plato. But one point ought to have particular attention. In the *Phaedo*, as in the Orphic type of thought in general, an absolute distinction is drawn between the soul and the body. It is the soul which is immortal, and the soul is only a part of man. Further reflection seemed to make it doubtful whether even the whole soul could be immortal—the soul, that is, with all the determinations and qualifications which constitute its individuality. As far as it could be identified with,

or regarded as akin to, the universal soul or *anima mundi*, it was immortal; but so far as it was the seat of emotions and passions it was determined by transitory things and could only be transient like them. As soul it was immortal; but not as *my* soul, or *yours*, or *his*. In Philo, for example, who is typical here, it is only the higher part of the soul, variously designated *πνεῦμα*, *νοῦς*, *διάνοια*, *λόγος*, or *τὸ λογικόν*, which is immortal. All that goes to constitute individuality, to distinguish

one man from another, is necessarily under the ban of death. In the world of science in which the philosopher lives you have to discount the personal equation, and the personal equation here means everything by which any man is distinguished either from God or from his neighbour. Science and philosophy deal only with universal and eternal truth, and no such personal *differentiae* can enter into their sphere.

A philosophy like this may

use the language of faith, and speak of the immortality of the soul, but it wholly fails to do justice to what this expression means in ordinary use. The immortality, for example, in which Plato was interested, and in which through the *Phaedo* he interests us, is not the immortality of soul; it is in some sense or other the immortality of Socrates. He had convictions and motives which made it practically impossible for him to believe that death could extinguish

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such a being; and whatever the worth of these convictions or motives may be, it is no satisfying of them to be told—and this is all that in some philosophers is meant by immortality—that science and virtue are eternal, and that in their eternal life the soul, so far as it is at one with them, is beyond the reach of death. The abstractions which we call science and virtue, or universal and eternal truth, or reason and law, are not more real than man, and it is not for man to be intimidated by

their imposing names. We do not rise into a higher world when we attach ourselves to such abstractions and leave behind us the concrete universe in which real human beings live and pass through real experiences. What we do is to lapse from an ethical to a non-ethical view of man; in other words, we pass into a region where some at least of the most potent factors of faith in immortality are out of our sight. This is what is done by all philosophies and religions

which offer us the eternity of the spirit as an equivalent or a substitute for the immortality of man. There have been many such in all nations and in all ages—Hindu, Greek, and modern; and all that can be said of them is that they are neither equivalents of the faith in immortality, nor substitutes for it; they are simply irrelevant to it, because they ignore in the main the impulses in which it originates. The eternity of spirit, if we can tell what that means, may be a presupposition of the im-

mortality of man, but it is not the same thing. Some kinship with eternal spirit may be indispensable, some native and indefeasible kinship even, if the soul, or—to use less equivocal language—if man, is to be capable of immortality; but something different from this, something conditioned by the convictions and motives already so often referred to is meant, when we speak of the hope of immortality as a power which has actually come to birth in the human race, and oper-

ated to moral ends in human life.

It would be tempting to survey the religions in which death and what comes after death has a great place, and to examine the motives to which their peculiar character is due. Among these religions those of Persia and Egypt are conspicuous. But it is impracticable to do this here, and I content myself with a single remark. While the faith in immortality can always be connected in its origin with distinctly ethical interests—

while it never receives any development except under moral motives—there seems to be a tendency in religions to moral degeneration, and to the provision for their devotees of other than moral means of dealing with situations which have no being nor significance except as moral. The inexorable and the absolute of the moral world are negotiated somehow. It was moral sense which evoked for the Egyptian the future he could not shun ; but a great part of his religion consisted of rites, mysteries,

sacraments, by which the moral sense was drugged, and moral situations managed by non-moral means. The truth apparently is, that when it originates spontaneously under the co-operation of such factors as we have seen to enter into it, the outlook on immortality may be a fear as well as a hope, and the immoral sophistries by which men bemuse and stupefy conscience in this world may be extended from it into the next. This does not prove, however, that immortality is an illegitimate

conception which ought not to have had a place in religion at all, and which can only act as a demoralising force. What it proves is that faith in immortality, where it exists at all, cannot exist as dead matter, so to speak; it is vitally connected with man's life and character as a whole, and is affected in its quality by all the influences which make him what he is.

From these general considerations I pass now to look at the faith in immortality as it appears in our own religion. I

use the expression to cover the whole of the experiences recorded in the Old Testament and the New, and also in the books of the Greek Bible which partly fill the interval between them. At a first glance we might think the two stages in the history of our religion were strongly contrasted in the very matter with which we are dealing. In the Old Testament, it may be said, immortality is conspicuous by its absence; we search for it, and search again, and usually (it would seem) in vain. In the

New Testament it is as conspicuous by its presence. It dominates everything. It is what is meant in the New Testament by hope. What Christ has done is to vanquish death and to bring life and immortality to light (2 Tim. i. 10). It is a deeply felt summary of the gospel which says, 'We have worn the image of the earthly man, and we shall wear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor. xv. 49). Yet though it is not till we reach the New Testament that we see this hope full blown,

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the factors which enter into it are at work in the Old Testament: the blossom, so to speak, is being prepared beneath the soil.

It is not trifling to say that the Bible doctrine of the creation of man underlies the Bible faith in his immortality. 'God created man in His own image.' Without pretending to define this too narrowly, we may surely say that it expresses the sense of man's affinity to God. It expresses also the sense of man's worth to God. The place which man has in the

creation is all his own; he is not only the consummation of nature but its sovereign; it is given to him for his inheritance, and he has a value to God which is incommensurable with the value of all created things. This is latent in his creation in the divine image, and it is strictly parallel to what we have seen elsewhere enter as a primary factor into the belief in immortality. But in Scripture it long remains latent. The interest of the Old Testament is not in man's aspirations towards God, but

in God's condescension, His approach, His redemption of man. Its central conception is that of God's covenant with His people. God really and historically enters into or establishes such a covenant. Within its conditions God and His people form one society. God is not shut out of the human world, but enters into it and finds in His people the instruments for the achievement of His purposes on the earth. The people, on the other hand, are not shut up to a merely natural or secular

existence, to a life in things which perish while they use them; they are partakers in a divine life, and fellow-workers with God in a work which can never perish. The historians of Old Testament religion have marked the distinction between the period when the nation existed and was the proper subject of religion and its hopes, and the later period when the dissolution of the nation gave importance to the individual and his relation to God. It is only at this later stage that the faith

in immortality emerges with any definiteness. For the purpose in hand I do not think it is of much consequence to trace the foreign influences, Iranian or other, which may have helped to put this faith into particular forms. The forms are not the main thing, but the conviction which found expression in them, and that conviction, there is no reason to doubt, was native to Israel, and rooted in experiences of God. An original affinity of the human and the divine, such as is asserted in the

doctrine of the creation of man in the divine image, is or may be presupposed in such experiences; a being for whom God cares, as in the experience of pious Israelites he cared for them, must be one akin to God and dear to Him. But the experience of God's love in life, a providential and redeeming love, of which man was as sure as he was of his life itself, is the primary and the ultimate factor in the faith of immortality as it appears in the true religion. It is God's demonstrated and experienced

goodwill to man on which a hope of such inconceivable daring rests.

It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of this at any stage of the true religion. The high-water mark of faith, in the Old Testament and the New alike, touches this very point. Men did not at first grasp all that was implicit in the faithful and loving providence of God. They did not dream of what it was in the love of God to give and in the soul of man to receive. It was only by de-

grees that the infinity of the divine goodness dawned upon them, and the unimagined possibilities of the nature on which it was so unweariedly and inexhaustibly bestowed. It was not every day nor every hour that they could realise it, but there were high hours in which great spirits were uplifted on it as on a tidal wave, and gave expression to it in deathless words. 'Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and

afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.' There are scholars, as every one knows, who exclude immortality from this sublime utterance. It must be admitted that there is no doctrine of immortality in it. There is no express statement in it that man is immortal, or even that the soul of the pious man is

so ; there is no doctrine in it of any kind. But there is an experience in it of the perpetual presence, love and power of God, and a triumphant hope and assurance based on this experience, that nothing can ever come between God and the singer ; a hope and assurance which are the very nerve of faith in immortality where that faith is most explicit, and which seem to me unquestionably to rise to the height of that faith here. The words, in short, are on a level with the words of

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Jesus in John x. 27—on a level, I mean, as indicating the same ultimate factor in the faith in immortality: ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, which hath given them unto Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch out of the Father’s hand.’ *‘No one is able to snatch out of the Father’s hand’*: there, in the true religion, is the

primary factor of immortal faith. It is the same in the wonderful passage in which Paul gives inspired and adoring expression to what the redeeming goodness of God has wrought into his mind: 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' It is just as true to say of this

passage, as of the one from the 73rd Psalm, that it does not teach immortality. Neither of them teaches anything at all. Neither the Psalmist nor the apostle, as they wrote, breathed in a region where philosophical theorems or theological doctrines were of any interest: but each of them put his whole soul into the utterance of an experience of God which neutralised all that either life or death could do to separate him from the divine love. This is the only real form in which faith in immor-

tality can exist. Whether immortality itself is conditional or not, such faith in it is assuredly conditioned. It is conditioned not speculatively but practically. It is conditioned by an overwhelming experience of the love of God—a love intimate, patient, redeeming, the first and last of all realities to the soul.

From the point of view of the true religion, therefore, which (as we have seen) is essentially the same, so far as immortality is concerned, in the Old Testament and in the

New, there is something beside the mark in a challenge addressed to religion from without to defend this element of its faith. It is not the primary duty of religion to be ready with a doctrine of man or of the soul in which the most rank outsider may see that immortality is necessarily involved in premises which he cannot dispute. Immortality is not an implication of some philosophical conception of the soul; so far as it has a vital place in religion, it is an inference from a peculiar experience

of God. The business of religion is not to give a demonstration that man is immortal, independent of this experience ; it is to propagate the experience out of which the faith in immortality springs. There is no way to produce such faith but so to preach the revelation of God that that assurance of His love will take possession of the heart which makes death impotent. Reduced to its simplest terms, the question of immortality is the question of how much God will give, and how much man is able and

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willing to receive ; and it cannot be conceived, much less discussed, by those to whom God and man, and the interrelation and interaction of the human and the divine, are unreal. The biologist who answers it in the negative, from the plane of his own science, is wasting his time. No one believes in immortality on that plane : all the essential factors of faith are given in an experience in which physics and biology are already transcended.

The history of the true religion, however, enables us to

speak of this with more precision. The hope of immortality had a legitimate birth in Old Testament times: it awoke in hearts profoundly impressed with the friendship of God. But for long it filled only a comparatively small place in the spiritual life. What, apparently, was needed to vitalise it, to make it contagious, to raise it to a high power among the constituents of religion, was an experience which would compel men to take the idea of friendship with God in all seriousness.

Such an experience came through persecution for religion. The great monument of this in the Old Testament is the Book of Daniel. Written during the persecution of the faithful Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, it breathes the spirit of the time. The Lord's battle is raging, and it is written to encourage those who are on the Lord's side. The Lord's victory is eventually sure, and the conviction forms inevitably in pious hearts that those who have fallen in the good fight will not be excluded from the victory when it comes.

It is in Daniel, the Old Testament book of martyrs, that we have the clearest proclamation of immortality. 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' This is the temper of the Maccabaeian period, in which the belief in immortality became a piece of orthodox Jewish religion; it is the tem-

per also of the Christian religion, in the age of Nero and Domitian, as we see it reflected in the New Testament apocalypse ; and of other persecuting and suffering epochs, like the Covenanting one in Scotland. If there could be such a being as a mere spectator, or, as it is sometimes said, an impartial spectator, of the moral conflict going on in the world, he might easily be sceptical of immortality ; *ex hypothesi*, the factors which enter into and produce faith in it are unknown to him. But the martyrs are not sceptics. And they do not die,

really, because they believe in immortality—though once immortality has become a commonplace of faith it may be put so ; immortality is revealed and becomes sure to them because they find it in their hearts to lay down life itself for God.

It may seem paradoxical, but it is literally true, that historically immortality and martyrdom are correlative terms ; and it is only those who have in their moral life an experience which is of one piece with that of the martyrs who can have any assurance of immortality, or even any idea of what it

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means, or of the grounds on which faith in it rests. The two great factors concerned in its production in the true religion are those we have now mentioned ; an overpowering experience of the redeeming love of God, and a response to that love so absolute and unreserved that it does not count life itself dear to be true to it. Spiritually, the Christian faith in immortality is conditioned by these two things ; where they both exist, faith rises to its highest power. Where faith is feeble, it is where either or both are inoperative. Is it not

worth while to ask, in a generation in which faith is feeble, and doubters many, whether it is possible for some people to believe in immortality, or rather whether they have any right to believe in it? It is a stupendous idea, when we really take it in; and to grasp it as not merely an idea but a reality implies spiritual strength on a corresponding scale. How *can* a man believe in immortality who has invested his whole being in things which perish as he uses them? How can he believe in immortality if he does not know something which is better

than life, if he is not identified with a cause and an interest to which life itself may well be surrendered? He cannot do it. He cannot evade the conditions under which the faith in immortality, as true religion knows it, was born, and by which it is sustained, and still believe. The man who has nothing in life he would die for has nothing in life worth living for; and the life which is not worth living will never believe in its own immortality. A great moral possession, like faith in immortality, must

always be bought with a great moral price; a man must sell all that he has to buy it. What Plato said long ago about the materialists who grasped rocks and oaks as the only realities—that they required to be improved before they could be argued with—may be said without censoriousness of many who doubt immortality to-day. As it appears in the history of the true religion, faith in immortality is part of a development in which an intimate experience of God's love is responded to by an un-

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reserved surrender of the life to Him, and there is no reality in thinking or speaking of it apart from these conditions. What is implied about the soul, or about human nature, by the fact that experiences like this are possible for it, is an ulterior question ; but no doctrine of the soul will do the soul justice which does not argue back from these experiences ; and no metaphysical doctrine of the soul can ever be demonstrated *a priori* which will enable us to deduce these experiences from it. Every

discussion of immortality, to be real, must move in a world which is ethically and experimentally conditioned throughout.

I can understand that some one should find a great blank in all this, as a study of the factors of faith in immortality, especially as they appear in the true religion. What, it will be said, of Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light? What of the truth that it is Christ in us who is the hope of glory, or that as in Adam all die, even

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so in Christ shall all be made alive? What, in particular, of the Resurrection of Jesus?

→ To begin with, it is important to notice that Jesus in His own person is a signal illustration of such faith in immortality as characterises the true religion—a faith the factors in which are an assurance of God's love, and an absolute martyr devotion to Him. There is nothing in history to parallel the calmness and certainty with which Jesus speaks of the life beyond death, and inspires others to speak of it. 'In My Father's

house are many mansions.’
‘To-day shalt thou be with
Me in Paradise.’ ‘Father,
into Thy hands I commend My
spirit.’ In Jesus, as in those
whom He is not ashamed to
call brethren, such assurance is
of one piece with His certainty
of the Father’s love, and with
His devotion, even to death, to
the Father’s will. It is not an
accident that the calmest and
most untroubled faith in im-
mortality known to human his-
tory is found in the spirit in
which both these factors of faith
have had their perfect work—

the spirit of Him who knew God not only as friend but as Father, and who laid down His life in the Father's service. It is not an accident, but a confirmation of what we have already seen to be the essential truth as to the origin of such faith. We must bear this in mind in what follows.

The Resurrection of Jesus is unquestionably a factor of supreme importance in the Christian faith in immortality. Not that faith in immortality actually owed its existence to the Resurrection: we have

seen already that it existed before. But for those who saw the risen Saviour, and for those who received their testimony, the Resurrection gave faith a new vividness and certainty.¹ The God in whom

¹ See the interesting passage in Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (2nd ed.), 90. After pointing out that there is no trace in the psalms, even the latest, of the universal resurrection and the judgment of all men in the other world, but that the Pharisees had succeeded in establishing both as orthodox dogmas before Christ came, he writes: Das Evangelium steht in diesem Punkte, wie in anderen, auf dem Boden des gleichzeitigen pharisäischen Judentums. Es setzt die Entwicklung

they trusted, and to whom they were resolved to be true even to death, made bare in it His holy arm, and acted decisively for the confirmation of their faith. In the Resurrection, death was abolished not in faith merely but in voraus, wodurch in Widerspruch zum Alten Testament der Schwerpunkt der Religion vom Volk in das Individuum verlegt wird, und der Glaube oder die Hoffnung von Diesseits in ein Jenseits. Der Gipfel, zu dem die Juden aus ihrer älteren Tradition mühsam sich empor arbeiteten, wird aber nun zum Fundament einer neuen Religion. Und dies Fundament gewinnt durch die Auferstehung Jesu eine gewaltige Kraft und Tragfähigkeit.

fact; life and immortality, which had often seemed doubtful and obscure, were brought finally and triumphantly into the light. To men who had seen the Lord, the life beyond death henceforth transcended in reality both death itself and the life which led up to it, and the contagion of their assurance passed like fire from heart to heart. It would be an illusion, however, if we supposed that it passed independently of those factors of the faith in immortality which we have already seen

to be operative even in Jesus. The Resurrection of Jesus was not a resurrection *simpliciter* : it was not the revelation, in the case of Jesus, of something which inevitably awaited all human beings in virtue of their inalienable human nature ; it was the resurrection of One who had known the Father's love and died to fulfil the Father's will ; and when it took possession of men's hearts, it took possession of them as a power in which divine love, and martyr faithfulness, and the victory over death, were

inseparable elements of one whole. These elements interpenetrated from the first, and if our thoughts and words about immortality are to be real they must interpenetrate to the last. The Risen Lord does not give us a faith in immortality independent of the factors which generated faith from the beginning; but by the working of His spirit in us, uniting us to Himself, He enables us to realise those factors as they were present in His own life: He makes us immovably sure of God's love,

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and He enables us to become conformed to His own death. It is in this sense that Christ in us is the hope of glory. This is the way, and even for Christians it is the only way, of attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. iii. 10 f.). If we are begotten again to a living hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is because that resurrection vivifies in us the experiences from which faith springs, and sets its divine seal upon them. To say this is not to disparage in the least the historical fact of

the Resurrection : by that fact the Christian religion stands or falls. It is only to remind ourselves that what is sometimes called the historical fact of the Resurrection is also, sometimes, too abstractly and therefore unreally conceived ; and that if we wish to apprehend the truth we must take account of the Resurrection as an indivisible whole, in all its relations, spiritual as well as historical. We must think of it as what it was—the Father's glorifying of the Son. It is this which inspires all the high

utterances of the New Testament about immortality. The speakers are conscious that the Resurrection is a supreme revelation : it shows what God can do for man, and what man is capable of receiving from God. But this revelation is made in the Person of One whose life constrained those who knew Him to feel that in His case the final victory of death would be not only an indignity but an incredibility. 'It was not possible that *He* should be holden of it' (Acts ii. 24). And it is through a

fellowship of life with Him—a fellowship, wrought by the spirit of the Risen Saviour, in that life which is revealed to us in the days of His flesh—that we grow into an assurance of immortality like that in which He lived and died.

In the New Testament utterances about immortality, to which reference has just been made, we have a singular proof, too easily overlooked, of the immense power with which the Resurrection of Jesus entered as a factor into the Christian faith that death has

been finally overcome. The New Testament, it is not too much to say, is the only book in the world which speaks worthily and adequately of immortality; and this unique and remarkable power is bound up with that conception of immortality which it owes to the Resurrection of Jesus. If immortality is real, it is stupendous; the effect of believing in it is or ought to be an enlargement of the mind in comparison with which all that we owe to the discovery of America or to the Copernican

astronomy would shrink into insignificance. If we are to believe in it, it must be because it has produced in those who preach it an uplift or expansion of nature corresponding to it in magnitude; we must be conscious, as we listen to them, that they breathe an ampler ether, a diviner air, and that their accent is not of earth, but of heaven. And this is what we do find in the New Testament, thanks, undoubtedly, to the Resurrection of Jesus. Think of passages like the fifteenth chap-

ter of first Corinthians, or the fourth and fifth of second Corinthians, or the eighth of Romans, or the first of first Peter, or the seventh of Revelation. I will quote only one. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begot us again unto a living hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are guarded by the power of God through faith

unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.' The amplitude and elevation of a passage like this, which, apart from other New Testament utterances, is, I venture to think, unparalleled, is at once an argument for the Resurrection of Jesus—for surely such a quickening and enlargement of human faculty as it exhibits must have had an adequate cause—and a proof that the specifically Christian faith in immortality has in that Resurrection one of its indispensable factors. The same

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holds of the other passages mentioned above. If we look at them simply as human documents, in which the mind is seen exalted to a power hitherto strange to it, they bear convincing testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus which inspired them; and the want of any real parallel to them elsewhere shows that nothing but the Resurrection of Jesus can beget such soaring and triumphant faith. It is not enough to say that He is a factor in the Christian faith in immortality; as we have seen

already, all its factors meet in Him, and are divinely attested in His Resurrection. He has the right to say, I am Resurrection and Life.

In these references to the factors of faith, and especially of Christian faith, in immortality, one thing has never been mentioned, and another has fallen into the background. That which has not been mentioned is the desire to be reunited to those whom we have loved here, and from whom we have been parted by death. It is not easy to say how far this

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natural need and craving of the heart has contributed to make the supernatural life beyond death credible. There are men who have not been attracted by the idea of immortality till they saw their children growing up around them, and could not face the idea of a final dissolution of the bond of love which made them all one. Literature has many poignant illustrations of this and similar feelings. The heart clings even through death to those whom it has loved. 'He lies by the ships

a corpse' — says Achilles of his friend—'unwept, unburied, Patroclus; but him I will not forget, as long as I am myself among the living and my limbs bestir them; and if men do quite forget the dead in Hades, yet even there will I remember my dear comrade!' ¹ 'Tomb, bridal chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock, whither I go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom Persephone hath received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass thither, and

¹ *Iliad*, xxii. 386 ff.

fare most miserably of all, before the term of my life is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee; for when ye died with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink offerings at your graves; and now, Polynices, 'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this!'¹ Antigone was a martyr to the obligations of

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 891 ff. Jebb's translation.

family duty, but although natural affection was to this extent spiritualised in her case, its root in nature is not to be ignored when we think of its tenderness and strength. 'Ah, father, dear one, ah, thou who hast put on the darkness of the underworld for ever, not even there shalt thou ever lack our love—her love and mine.'¹ The most wonderful sanction for the instinct with which human love reaches out into the unseen and takes possession of it is given in St. John's

¹ *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1700 ff.

Gospel. 'In My Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. For I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.' '*If it were not so, I would have told you.*' The instinct with which the heart moves in this direction needs, according to Jesus, no justification: had the truth lain in another direction He would have given us explicit warning. Nevertheless, when we look at

the faith in immortality in human history, we cannot say that the desire for reunion with friends has been a large factor in producing it. It is rather something which makes it welcome, and can be woven into it, than an effective cause contributing to bring it into being.¹

The factor of faith which has fallen into the background is

¹ The contrary, however, would seem to be supported by such a sentence as the following from Tolstoi: 'Je veux dire que ce ne sont pas les raisonnements qui vous mènent à admettre la nécessité de la vie future, mais lorsqu'on marche

the moral demand for retribution. In the Greek belief this had, as a rule, a conspicuous place. As we have already seen, Plato teaches explicitly that the bad would have too good a bargain if death ended all. In this precise form the

à deux dans la vie, et que tout à coup votre compagnon disparaît, là-bas, dans le vide, qu'on s'arrête devant cet abîme, qu'on y regarde—la conviction s'impose, et *j'ai regardé!*' Compare also the striking passage in the *Clementine Homilies*, xii. 14: Would I were persuaded (says Mattidia) that souls are found in Hades living; in that case I should despise the punishment (for suicide) and be glad to die ὅπως τοὺς ἐμοὺς περιποθήτους ἴδω κἂν μίαν ὥραν.

idea of retribution does not bulk largely in the Christian faith in immortality. This faith is concerned rather with what God will do for those who are in Christ than with what will befall the wicked; an independent interest in the fate of the wicked is not characteristic of the New Testament. But the factor of faith which appears in Plato as the necessity of retribution does appear in the New Testament in wider relations. The Christian hope is a hope in the coming of God's Kingdom.

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When it comes, God Himself comes to do right by all who have been wronged, and to establish righteousness in undisputed sovereignty. The motives to faith which were once specially connected with retribution find their place in this larger context. Retribution has justice done to it when it is subordinated to faith in the righteousness of God, and in the kingdom of righteousness in which God's sovereignty is to be realised. In the Christian religion it holds, as a factor of faith in immortality,

a real but a secondary place. The primary factors are those which have been already considered—the love of God to man, the capacity in man of an absolute devotion to God, and the power of Christ's Resurrection. If these are real and rational, so is the faith to which they give birth. It is as legitimate as they are, and neither more so nor less ; and until we are able, on the basis of experience, to estimate for ourselves the value of these factors of the faith, the faith itself is simply beyond our

reach. We do not know what it means, and we do not know upon what it rests. It is equally out of our power to confute or to confirm it.

It is impossible, at this stage, to consider what inferences can be drawn as to the nature of man or of his soul from such a faith in immortality as has here been reviewed. Most people probably would say that it implied some kind of affinity between the human and the divine—that it agreed with and therefore confirmed the idea that man is

made in the image of God. How this is to be scientifically construed is a further question, but there are two remarks, suggested by the whole subject, with which, as bearing on this question, I will conclude.

The first is, that the affinity of the human for the divine must not be interpreted in such a way as to signify that the human soul partakes in the eternity of spirit, and that when death comes, and all the natural relations which determined its individuality are destroyed, it is absorbed again

in the divine as a drop of water which has somehow been lifted from the ocean falls back again into its bosom and as a drop ceases to be. To represent the nature of the soul thus would be to deduce from man's faith in immortality, and from all the factors in experience which go to generate it, a conception of the soul at variance with the very thing it had to explain. It is idle to start except on an experimental basis, and what the experimental basis requires is a doctrine of the soul or of

human nature consistent with such an ethically conditioned faith in personal immortality as has actually emerged in human history. A doctrine of man or of the soul to which personal immortality is insignificant and impossible stands in no relation to the premises in experience from which we have started and from which we cannot but start. To put it briefly: individual men believe, because they have experiences which inspire such faith, that under given conditions they will be saved in

Christ; and it is a mere irrelevance to this genuine and legitimate faith in personal immortality when we are presented with a doctrine of the soul which shows how all men unconditionally will be lost in God.

The second remark is this. The affinity between God and man, which is presupposed in that living and religious faith in immortality which we have been considering, must not be exaggerated to mean that individual blessedness is eventually secure to all apart from

such experiences as those upon which faith in immortality is historically seen to be dependent. Apart from these experiences, so far as we can tell, the conception of immortality would never have risen upon the mind; and if we have a doctrine of man which demonstrates personal immortality *a priori*, such a doctrine also can only be described as irrelevant to all that makes the question of immortality one of vital interest to us. I have no desire to question what has been called the natural and

essential immortality of man. What I wish to emphasise is that, however true it may be, it is a truth without moral significance until it is brought into the moral world; and that the moment it is brought into the moral world it is experimentally conditioned in the ways we have seen. It owes its meaning, its value, its certainty or dubiety, and the hopes or fears which attach to it, to the attitude which men assume to possible moral experiences. Human nature is, indeed, capable of these experi-

ences ; it is capable of life in and for God, and therefore of life against which death is powerless ; but it is only as it accepts the life in God that the hope of immortality becomes real. Such a hope, in the Christian or in any high sense, is the greatest moral possession a man can have, but no doctrine of the soul can put it beforehand in his grasp. It has to be won by every man for himself, as he welcomes the love of God, fights the good fight, and experiences the power of the Resurrection of

Jesus. Our being is beyond our power, and we can no more annihilate than we could have created it; but what does vacant being mean? It is the experience of the soul which is important, here or hereafter, not its existence merely; and to give interest and reality to our thoughts of it, here or hereafter, it is on the basis of experience we must stand.

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